

42ND INF DIVISION

SAVERNE GAP

8 - 11 Jan 1945

Account of one battalion's defense of fortified positions against strong attack. A narrative by historical reporter, authenticated by units concerned with comments on tactical lessons. Considerable combat detail at squad and platoon level. Several maps and overlays. 15 pages.



I N T R O D U C T I O N

The notes from which this narrative was written were obtained by Sgt. William Bancroft of the Seventh Army Historical Section during interviews with key officers and enlisted men of the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry during the first week in February. At this time the 42nd Infantry Division was in a training area in the general vicinity of Chateau - Salins, France.

Sgt. Bancroft wrote the first draft of the narrative before he was sent to the hospital because of illness. He was evacuated to the U. S. A. The Bancroft draft of the narrative was sent to the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry during the latter part of May for comment and completion.

Overlays #1 and #2 were prepared by officers of the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry. The draft was checked and returned to the Historical Section, Seventh Army.

This narrative has been written from the Bancroft draft, checked by officers of the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry, and data appearing on overlays prepared by officers of this unit.

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MAPS:

Seltz, Sheet 1 - 2, France, 1:25,000.

Seltz, Sheet 1 - 2, France, 1:25,000. (Restricted-Maginat

Line Installations, over print.)

1st Battalion - 242nd Infantry - 42nd Division

HATTEN, FRANCE

8 January to 11 January

On January 8th, 1945 the 1st Battalion, 242nd Infantry 42nd Infantry Division occupied and defended the MLR on a frontage of 4,000 yards, running north and south with Hatten, the pivot point. (see overlay #1) The 3rd Battalion 242nd Infantry was on the right, the 3rd Battalion of the 313th Infantry on the left. ^{1st} platoon of AT Co 242nd Infantry., ^{1st} platoon minus ^{1st} TD of "B" Co., 813th TD, and "A" Battery of the 79th Division were in support. "B" Co 242nd Infantry was on the right of the railroad track, inclusive; "A" Co on the left. "C" Co in reserve had 20 men with wire and radio under command of Sgt. Merle Todd manning the OPLR. (see overlay #1). The MLR tied into nine pill boxes of various sizes of the old Maginot Line (see ~~MAP~~ #1.) The mission of the 1st Battalion 242nd Infantry was to hold the MLR at all costs.

At 090001A January '45, "A" Co reported contact with an enemy patrol at the blown out bridge near pillbox #9. Numerous flares were fired by the enemy. At one time "B" Co counted 14 different colored flares in the air at the same time. These patrol clashes continued with heavy small arms and automatic fire. Capt Corson of "A" Co phoned the Bn CP That he was withholding his primary 60 and 81mm mortar fires because he did not want to give away his weapons' location or fire plan. At 0225³A

Hatten was receiving heavy enemy artillery fire. All companies of the 1st Bn were fully alerted at 0400A. At 0500A, "A" Co phoned that an enemy infantry wave clad in white capes was attacking in force, centering their attack between pillboxes #4 and #6 (see overlay #2) "A" Co later phoned that some enemy infiltrated but their positions were still intact. Capt Montague, "B" Co and T/Sgt Todd of "C" Co on the OPLR phoned they were receiving enemy small arms and machine gun fire. At 0700A, enemy foot troops were still coming in the "A" Co area and had infiltrated to the top and sides of pillboxes #4 and #5. From this position, the enemy was firing into the rear of the men who were still in their foxholes on the MLR. Lt Lambert and S/Sgt Ockewixz of "D" Co were still in wire communication with Bn CP from pillboxes #4 and #7. Both called for 81mm mortar fire directly on their own heads. This fire inflicted heavy casualties on Jerry who was assaulting their positions. Wire communication was broken with these observers and with "A" Co. Radio silence was broken at 0753A, and the SCR 300 Bn net was opened with all the companies and the 81mm mortar platoon of "D" Co. Col Caum and Capt. Cunningham, the Regimental CO and S-3, arrived at the Bn CP at 0800. Heavy enemy artillery fire was falling on the 1st Bn front line positions and the Bn CP at 0754A. "A" Co was still in a fight around pillboxes #4 and #5. "B" Co area was reported to be relatively quiet. But A and B companies were still holding their positions. At 0745A Lt. Col. Rusteberg, the Bn CO, committed "C" Co reserve. With the mission of proceeding east from Hatten on the road that

divided "A" Co area to restore the original 1st Bn MLR in this area. "C" Co was to retake pillboxes #4 and #5 if they had fallen to the enemy. (The CO, "A" Co had committed his reserve). The strength of "C" Co., reserve was 85 men and 5 officers, 20 men of "C" Co were on the OPLR and were heavily engaged with the enemy. The artillery wire was broken at 0802A. "A" Co reported enemy foot troops were approaching the ~~CO~~ CP and moving into civilian houses on the east end of town. "C" Co encountered the Jerries in the houses and a sharp fire fight was on. These houses are on the crest of a hill and command the surrounding terrain. In reply to an order to assist "C" Co in the house to house fighting, "B" Co reported they were unable to support "C" Co in their attack on the houses. "C" Co was working from house to house with heavy small arms fire. T/Sgt Todd of "C" Co on the OPLR reported he was holding his positions and giving Jerry 'hell'. He was also sending in 17 PWs. Three TDs were pulling out of "A" Co area according to Capt. Corson. He and the Bn CO were not consulted. At 0820A, Lt Schank, "B" ^{CO} Executive Officer, reported 4 enemy tanks were moving west along the road leading to pillbox #1. Five additional tanks remained at the edge of the woods on the same road. Our artillery layed down a terrific barrage on the first four tanks, and they reversed their direction back to the protection of the woods. The Regt'l CO left the 1st Bn CP to alert his reserve Bn (the 2nd Bn) and to obtain armor support for the 1st Bn. Lt. Ettinger, 1st Bn S-2, was sent to the 2d Bn

to acquaint the 2nd Bn CO. With the situation, Lt. Schanck (Ex 00 Co B) continued to direct artillery fire on enemy concentration of tanks and foot troops at the edge of the woods. One enemy tank was burning and one turned over. At 0910A, "B" Co reported that four PWs, had been taken, on "B" Co man killed, five wounded and all positions intact. Enemy foot troops dressed in white caps were reported still massing at the edge of the woods. "A" Co reported at 0930A they still held pillbox #9. Capt., Corson of "A" Co observed "C" Co was having tough going with Jerry who still held two houses. He also radioed a friendly armored reconnaissance vehicle was at his CP, and he was going over to "C" Co in it to help drive Jerry out of the remaining houses. The armored vehicle was too light, and a TD was requested and sent to "C" Co. With the aid of their TD, Jerry was driven from the last houses. Capt. Corson then said he was going to #9 pillbox to take command. In a few minutes, he radioed that "A" Co still held, PBs 4,5,6,7,8, and 9 but Jerry occupied some of the fox holes on the MDR. "C" Co radioed they were sending in more PWs, needed more ammunition, and aid men. When "C" Co attacked Jerry in the houses on the east side of town, the weapons platoon received a command in English to withdraw because mortar fire was to be placed there. This command came from one of the houses. They did withdraw and returned to town some 400 yards distance before they were reorganized and were sent back to assist their company by Major Smith, the Bn Ex. O. It is believed this command to "withdraw" came from Jerry. Capt.

Montague of "B" Co radioed his positions were intact. His PB #0 on the Bn extreme right flank had not been in any action. The Bn Chaplain, got a call from C Co, said they needed aid men. 1st Lt. Father Herman Heide, left the Bn CO for "C" Co and took aid men with him. No further information came from him. "A" Co reported at 1010A they were sending in eight PWs captured near PB #8. Lt. Schanck, of "B" Co radioed for artillery fire on a green house 200 yards east of PB #1. He reported enemy foot troops were occupying it. Artillery communication was out, so "B" Co could not get the artillery fire requested. Co. "B" reported two enemy tanks again coming out of the woods toward PB #1 at 1045A. 1st Sgt Troy of "C" Co radioed they were on their way to PB 4 and 5, and the houses had been cleared of Jerries. He also reported all "C" Co officers were killed or wounded and that he, Sgt John J. Troy was in command. Col. Rustenberg ordered the "C" Co Exec-O, Lt Ivey who had remained at the CP of "C" Co to proceed at once to the troops and take charge of the company. At 1110A Lt. Ivey radioed he was reorganizing "C" Co and they were consolidating positions around PBs 4 and 5. The Bn CO radioed all companies to send a foot messenger to the Bn CP with full details of the company status. Enemy action was then scattered sniper fire. A tank commander (Major England) 14th armored reported at 1105A to the Bn CP and arranged with Col. Rustenberg to employ his tanks against any further enemy armor. He said his tanks were on the west side of Hatten, and we all felt Jerry was licked with this support behind us. The tank commander never brought his tanks in the town. It was later reported his orders had been counter-manded.

Notice of this was never given to Col/ Rustenberg. At 1107A "B" Co reported 5 enemy tanks coming down the road toward PB#1. Enemy foot troops in white capes followed these tanks. Our artillery lines were still out, and we could not take the enemy under fire. At 1118A Capt Montague of "B" Co radioed 18 tanks were approaching PB#1, followed by personnel carriers about 20 in number ~~coming~~^{carrying} about 15 to 20 men each. The carriers were painted white and blended against the snow on the ground. Again artillery could not be fired as communication was out. (Radio contact also lost.) Flame Throwers on enemy tanks were attacking PB #1, two men were observed coming out of the pill box and appeared to be surrendering. (a total of 28 tanks were used in this attack.) The enemy personnel carriers turned north across our front and up to the railroad tracks where foot troops dismounted. "B" Co front line fox holes were being overrun by tanks and foot troops. The enemy tanks passed PB #1 and continued on towards the town. Artillery communication was restored at 1130A, and Lt Schandk of "B" Co directed fire on the enemy foot troops between PBs 2 and 3. Our time fire was terrific with observed superior results, but another enemy wave followed. Enemy tanks had now reached the railroad tracks at the edge of town. Col. Rustenberg ordered Bazooka teams from the CP guard to go to the church and ambush the tanks from their flanks. However the teams were never seen again. Capt. Vincent Caringola of the AT Co also directed the laying of mine fields on the main street of town approaching the Bn CP. (see sketch). "A" Co radioed their area was

PB #9. This was at 1210A. "C" Co also radioed 2 enemy tanks followed by enemy foot troops were coming up the North side of the railroad tracks. Lt. Jenkins of "D" Co mortar platoon was radioed to take this threat under fire. Lt. Schanck observed from "B" Co CP and reported Lt. Jenkins was really "laying them in there." Lt. Jenkins continued until his positions were overrun, "A", "B", and "C" Co's requested orders from the Bn CO, Col Rusteberg, as to what to do. He radioed "hold your positions, let the tanks pass, and fire at the enemy foot troops". They held their positions to the end. One enemy tank approached the Bn CP, but stopped when they observed the AT mines laying in the street and effectively blocking the tanks passage. Two enemy tankers were observed crawling out of the turret of the tank. They were shot by our Bn CP guard. The Mark V buttoned up, raked our Bn CP building with machine gun fire and fired its 88mm point blank in the cellar window. The tank remained until 1500A and continued to blast the CP. A second enemy tank approached by the road near the church and fired in support of the enemy tank in front of the Bn CP. At 1510A, Capt, Corson of "A" Co radioed he had eighty men in PB #9, things were quiet, and they would hold out to the end. "C" Co was engaged in fighting the enemy near PB 4 and 5. "B" Co had been overrun with the exception of their 2d platoon on the extreme right flank. This platoon was attached to the 3rd Bn 242nd Infantry, when it could no longer be controlled by "B" Co. Lt Schanck radioed that he and Capt Montague and four CP personnel were going to hole up and hold out to the end. Lt. Duffy of "D"

LO, left the Bn Cp about 1400A when he could no longer support the Battalion. (The Art. Obs. had been knocked out of his position inside the church steeple.) Lt. Collins of "G" Co, 242nd Inf, reported to Col Rusteberg at 1500A. He was ordered to use his company to secure the west entrance of Hatten against enemy foot troops. Small arms fire, tank and artillery fire was falling ^{IN} the town from all directions. Col Rusteberg, Major Smith, Capt. Rochelle and Lt Johnson held a council of war in the celler of the Bn CP. It was decided to "stick it out". Capt. Burns and Capt. Brzical had been sent to Regiment to advise the CO of the 1st Bn situation. They were under enemy observation and sniper fire, but worked their way to the edge of town, commandeered an abandoned jeep and successfully reached the regiment CP. This liaison was the first with Regt, without it the 1st Bn would have been lost. Enemy grenades, machine guns, and 88mm fire continued to pour into the Bn CP. When darkness came, Jerry threw incendiary grenades in "D" Co CP and set their building on fire. Lt. Duffy radioed ~~he~~ would hold out until they were forced out by the fire. Further coordination was made to move to a building on the same side of the street as the Bn CP. The Bn CP Guard would cover his move by fire. The Bn SCR 300 switched to the Regt channel and radioed information to Regt; One message was received that a strong patrol was on its way up to the 1st Bn positions and to hold out. Col. Gaam, Regt'l CO, Maj. Mitchell, Regt. S-2, Major Reynolds, CO. 2nd Bn, and Major Valentine

Ex. O, 2nd Bn, ^{entered} the town from the west with a patrol of one platoon and arrived at 1st Bn CP at 2030A. "D" Co building was ablaze and they joined forces with the Bn CP group. This strong patrol led by Col. Gaum entered the town, ^{and} came down the main street with practically no resistance on the part of Jerry. Col. Gaum ordered the town buildings flushed of all enemy and to reestablish the MLR. Jerry then sprung his trap, opening fire with machine guns and 88mm assault guns directly into the Bn CP. He had let the patrol enter the town, assemble in and around the Bn CP and then "poured it on." The situation was as bad as it had been before. The first burst of Jerry machine gun fire killed one man and flying fragments injured two others in the CP. S/Sgt Greenhalgh and Pvt Willey were sent with AT rifle grenades to locate and knock out the assault gun that was firing at the CP and to the right rear, of the CP. Three enemy machine gunners were protecting this assault gun and it ^{is} believed Sgt Greenhalgh and Pvt Willey were killed as they worked their way toward the gun. The assault gun had a machine gunner in the same building. He would fire a burst into the CP. Two buildings behind another enemy machine gunner would follow suit firing from the second floor. In the confusion of machine gun fire, it was difficult to locate the position of the assault gun. Sgt Greenhalgh and Pvt Willey had the last two rifle grenades, and there were no Bazookas available. Col. Gaum ordered Co/ Rusteberg to move the 1st Bn CP as he feared TNT charges would be thrown into

charges were thrown into the barn and building adjoining the CP and one man was killed. Another assault gun fired on us from the east edge of town, a third gun fired from the church corner. This cross fire commanded all the main streets of Hatten, and we were in the middle of it. Grenades, small arms, machine gun, and assault gun fire continued throughout the night of 9 January '45. Col. Caum and his S-2 made their way safely out of the town. Major Reynolds and his patrol platoon set up their CP two buildings west of the 1st Bn CP. Capt Burns and Capt Brzica infiltrated back to the 1st Bn CP at 2330A, 9 January '45. S/Sgt Rixe of "D" Co killed four Krauts as they tried to assault the Bn CP. Pvt Bertholdo of the CP Guard strapped a LMG to a table in the front room of the Bn CP. He observed 15 Jerries following a personnel carrier near the church at a range of 100 yards. All the Krauts were taken under his fire and killed and the personnel carrier immobilized. In the face of direct fire from a Mark V tank, Pvt. Vito Bertholdo stayed at his post and continued to fire. His assistant gunner, Pvt. John Grabos of "C" Co was severely wounded. The Bn CP moved a second time in the early morning of 10 January '45, when Jerry again assaulted the building. On the afternoon of 9 January, it was planned with Major Reynolds, CO 2d Bn, 242nd Inf. that "G" Co would move from their positions on the west side of Hatten. They were to flush all buildings on both sides of the street, move east to the 1st Bn CP where the remaining 1st Bn personnel would join them, and

the fire power of enemy tanks and assault

guns bogged this effort down in short order. The 2d Bn, 315th Inf, was reported on its way to Hatten to relieve us. Their plan was to use two companies, one on each side of the town, go through us and take over the MLR. They were also stopped before reaching the buildings we held near the church. Four men of our "C" Co joined up with the 315th Inf and fought with them in Hatten until 14 Jan '45. The sector of the 1st Bn 242nd Inf was officially turned over to the 2d Bn 315th Inf as of 101730A Jan. Capt. Burns 2nd Bn S-3 and Capt Brzica 2nd Bn S-1 again made their way out of Hatten to the west, The afternoon of 10 Jan. Col Rusteberg, Major Smith, Capt, Rochelle, Lt. Duffy, and Lt Ettinger with the remaining enlisted personnel of the 1st Bn started to leave Hatten for Rottershausen 110330A Jan. Capt. Rochelle and Lt Duffy were the last to leave at about 0500. They sent out small groups of three until the entire 1st Bn had cleared. The 1st Bn 242nd Inf. action lasted fifty-two hours. It was definitely established that it was engaged by elements of the 21st and 25th Panzer Divisions. The effective strength of the 1st Bn 242nd Inf as of 82400A Jan was 33 officers and seven hundred forty-eight EM. The effective strength as of 11 Jan was 11 officers and 253 EM. The low temperature during this period was 15 degrees F, weather clear and cold, during the day, with heavy ground fog during the night and early morning hours. The ground had a blanket of snow.

OBSERVATIONS

1. There should be more Bazookas in the Rifle companies, and ammunition for them must be obtained. All personnel must know how to fire this weapon. They must be employed to knock out enemy armor and be able to move to other canceled positions before enemy foot troops can move in to stop these tactics. AT rifle grenades must supplement the Bazooka and can be employed only against very vulnerable parts of tanks. Bazookas must be kept at the Command Posts also as protection.

2. TD and tank support must maintain close liaison with the infantry battalion it is supporting. They cannot pull out or change positions without knowledge of the Bn Commander of Infantry.

3. At least one days' emergency food and water rations must be kept on all defensive positions.

4. An individual AT weapon with an accurate range of 300 yards or more is desired. A weapon similar to the Fromusket or other larger caliber recoilless weapons is recommended.

5. Alternate Battalion Aid Stations are recommended, and to be located away from all Command Posts. Jerry knows our habits of aid Stations close to Command Posts;

6. Small townson or near the lines should be cleared of civilians. They are very good snipers, and no doubt give information to the enemy about our installations.

7. This Bn has a 13 man Command Post Guard under command of the S-1. They are men from the lettered companies and attached to

have been wiped out. It is recommended as a part of Bn Headquarters Co T/O.

8. In the Battle of Hatten, Infantry communication was superior. The Bn CO had complete control, with a telephone circuit to every defensive position. We had 24 drop hook-up, plus sound power within the companies. The T-E on switchboard, EE-8, and sound power phones is inadequate in the Infantry Bn. We borrowed a switchboard from another unit to supplement the normal T/E. Alternate wire lines had been prepared running to the basements of the Bn CP, and switchboard buildings. When enemy artillery fire hit us, it took but a few minutes to displace downstairs. It is SOP in this Bn., Telephone switchboards operators must know their jobs. At times, the Bn Commander had 8 parties on conference call with complete control. Pfc Percy Chase was on the switchboard during the enemy artillery shelling. He stuck to his post until severely wounded by artillery fire. The T/O of the Bn communication platoon does not provide enough wiremen. This Bn has 2 from each of their lettered companies to supplement the wire section. The Bn SCR 536 batteries must be on hand in the defensive positions to replace dead batteries. There is no substitute for wire communication, with foot messengers, motorized messengers, and radio as an alternate. Tactical SECURITY on wire and radio conversations must be stressed. Radio communication was in with all companies of the Bn until 91930A Jan. Communication cannot be over-emphasized.

9. Our supporting artillery did a superior job as long as they had communication. We cannot say enough for them, except the Infantry-artillery Team is unbeatable.

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Participating Officers in The Battle of Hatten who made this report and observation possible:

Lt. Colonel Edwin Rusteberg, Cmdg. - 1st Bn., 242nd Infantry.
Major B.J. Smith, Executive Officer - " " " "
Captain S.M. Brzica, S-1 & Hq Commandant 1st Bn., 242nd Infantry.
Captain Geo. A Burns S-3
Lt R.H. Johnson, Ass't S-3
Lt. Geo. W. Hoke, S-4
Lt. Harvey Ettinger, S-2
Lt. Pezdirtz, Bn M.T.C.
Lt. Kelley, A & P Platoon leader
Lt. John R. Smith, A-T Platoon leader
T/Sgt David Maher, Communication Sgt.

"A"

Capt Wm. Corson, "A" Co CO.
Lt. Thomas Heavey, Executive Officer.
Lt. Riggen, Platoon Leader.
Lt. Ralph Thompson Bat. Leader.
Lt. Sinclair, Platoon Leader.
T/Sgt Joe Howe, Platoon leader.

"B"

Capt. B.F. Montague, "B" Co CO.
Lt. Harold Schanck, Executive Officer.
Lt. Vickery, Platoon leader.
Lt. Michaud, Platoon leader.
Lt. Boyt, Platoon leader.
Lt. Stowe, Platoon leader.

"C"

Lt. James Long, "C" Co CO.
Lt. Benj. Ivey, Exec Officer
Lt. Franklin, Plat. Ldr.
Lt. Richards, Plat. Ldr.
Lt. Collins, Plat. Ldr.
T/Sgt Dahl, Plat. Ldr.

"D"

Capt. Wm J. Rochelle, "D" Co CO.
Lt. Robt. Duffy Exec. O.
Lt. John Hughes, Plat. Ldr.
Lt. Lambett, Plat. Ldr.
Lt. Jenkins, Plat. Ldr.
Lt. Cooley, 8lmm Sec Ldr.
Lt. Deloney, 8lmm Sec Ldr.
S/Sgt Marcel Montague 8lmm Sec Ldr.

By order of Lt. Col Edwin
Rusteberg, Cmdg. 1st Bn., 242nd
Inf. Division

Russell H. Johnson, 1st Lt. Inf.
Ass't S-3